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ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes research on the self concept of differentially placed educable mentally retarded (EMR) students and hypothesizes covarying factors which may suggest to educators variables to be taken into account in placement decisions. Considered are such factors as IQ, reading achievement, and being the only retarded child mainstreamed into a class. Among conclusions are that high IQ EMR students seem to do well in a mainstreamed environment in terms of self concept while low IQ EMR students with poorer reading skills maintain higher self concept in self contained classes: and that to place a child in an educational environment in which he cannot maintain feelings of self worth may actually increase rather than decrease the restrictiveness of the school environment. (SBH)

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TITLE: The Effect of Differential Educational Placements on the Self Concept of Retarded Pupils: A review

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ABSTRACT

Administrative placement decisions concerning mainstreaming of EMR pupils have traditionally been made on the basis of academic variables. Only recently have the effects of mainstreaming on the self concept of EMR students begun to be investigated. The present paper review studies the effect of mainstreaming on self concept in light of covarying factors such as IQ, reading achievement, and being the only retarded child mainstreamed into a class. Recommendation for criteria regarding placement decisions regarding these pupils are made.

THE EFFECT OF DIFFERENTIAL EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENTS ON THE SELF CONCEPT OF RETARDED PUPILS: A REVIEW

The recent trend toward least restrictive educational placement for mentally retarded children has resulted in substantial changes in the education provided for these pupils. For many mentally handicapped students, least restrictive environment has meant mainstreamed placement with supplementary instruction designed to facilitate academic success (Owen, Blount, and Moscow, 1978). Arguments for or against mainstreaming, however, have usually centered around questions of academic achievement and only recently has the effects of differential educational settings on self concept been investigated.

Earlier research on self concept development points to a strong positive relationship between academic achievement and self concept (McIntire and Drummond, 1977; Purkey, 1970; Williams and Cole, 1968; Wylie, 1961). In addition, self concept has also been shown to be positively related with achievement motivation (Dion and Miller, 1973; Sheffler, Lynch-Sauer, and Nadelman, 1977), cognitive style (McIntire and Drummond, 1976), and locus of control (Friend and Neale, 1972; Kifer, 1975). The self concept has been hypothesized to be a critical construct in the total functioning of the child (Tolor, Tolor, and Blumin, 1977). It has been proposed that it acts as a circular force which determines how experiences are to be interpreted and whether or not new experiences will be attempted (Diggory, 1966; Felker, 1974). In short, self concept has been theorized to be a major mechanism for maintaining psychological equilibrium (Felker, 1974).

The mentally handicapped child, by nature of his intellectual dysfunctioning and probable awareness of academic shortcomings, is particulary susceptible to the

deleterious effects of deminished self concept (Mallenby, 1973, 1974). The strong relationship between a retarded pupil's self concept, intellectual functioning, and school success might suggest that one criterion for choosing appropriate educational placements for retarded pupils be the effect of the placement on self concept.

Since special educators are faced daily with questions of appropriate placement for mentally retarded students, it would appear that a review of the literature regarding self concpet of differentially placed pupils would be relevant. However, in a recent research topic such as this, discrepant empirical results have been obtained due to a variety of populations and assessment instruments used. This paper is an attempt to critically analyze current research on the topic, tying together common threads of instrumentation and population choices as well as criticizing methodologies. The second purpose of the paper is to hypothesize covarying factors which may suggest to educators variables to be taken into account in placement decisions.

SELF CONCEPT AND DIFFERENTIAL SPECIAL CLASS PLACEMENT

Arguments for mainstreaming retarded children have centered around academic concerns and it has only been recently that variables such as self concept have been considered important. Meyers (1976), for example, asserts that retarded pupils have been mainstreamed into regular classes without any clear evidence that either segregating these pupils from the normal peer group or labeling them "retarded" is harmful to the self concept of the child. Meyers investigated groups of "high IQ" EMR pupils (IQ 71-85) and "low IQ" EMR pupils (IQ 49-70) in three educational settings; the special education segregated school, the special education segregated class integrated into the regular school, and mainstreamed placement.

Two hundred-seventy six elementary school age pupils of the two IQ groups from the three educational settings were assessed in the areas of intelligence, academic

achievement, self concept, and social adjustment. Assessment instruments used were the Slosson Intelligence Test, the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale (Piers-Harris), and the Ohio Social Acceptance Scale respectively.

An analysis of covariance conducted with IQ as a covariant indicated differential findings for the high IQ and low IQ EMR groups. The low IQ EMR pupils enrolled in the segregated school setting scored higher in self concept than low IQ EMR students enrolled in either the special classes or regular classes. However, no differences were found between the three educational placements for the high IQ EMR children. Meyers concluded that (1) the mainstreaming model was not clearly supported in terms of facilitating self concept of EMR pupils, (2) the special segregated school may actually be a more appropriate placement for development of self concept for certain EMR pupils, and (3) none of the placements investigated were significantly more facilitative in enhancing self concept of high IQ EMR pupils.

Additionally, Meyers offered a possible explanation for the differential and conflicting results concerning the interaction of self concept and educational setting of EMR pupils. Since placement was apparently a significant factor for low IQ EMR pupils but not for high IQ EMR pupils, Meyers hypothesized that differing empirical results in other studies may have been due to the different EMR populations used in the studies. Meyers hypothesized that the high IQ EMR pupils in the regular classes were able to learn more incidental material from nonretarded peers and thus were able to move toward classroom group norms in academic achievement. However, since the more seriously retarded children were not able to benefit from incidental learning situations (see Denny, 1966; Zeaman and House, 1963 for further discussion), these pupils needed the individualized and intentional instruction provided in the special class placement.

In an earlier, longitudinal study, Schurr, Towne and Joiner argued that reaching conclusions to oneself, either publicly or privately about ability to achieve

in academic situations sets limits on the kinds of school behaviors which will voluntarily be undertaken. According to Schurr et al., categorization or labeling of a child as retarded, which occurs publicly through special class placement, interferes with development of a healthy self concept.

Schurr et al. proceeded to investigate whether academic self concept declined after a child was officially designated as retarded and was placed in a special education class. The study was conducted in two stages over a two year period. Stage I consisted of the administration of the Michigan State University Self Concept of Academic Ability Scale to 62 EMR children twice prior to special class placement and four times during the first year of special classes. Stage II consisted of administration of the same instrument two years after initiation of Stage I. During the interval between the onset of Stage I and the end of Stage II, Schurr, et al. reported that 22 subjects participating in Stage I did not complete Stage II.

Contrary to predictions, Schurr, et al did not find a decrease in self concept following special class placement. Rather, self concept increased during the first year and continued to climb in the second year. From these results, the authors concluded that special class placement had a facilitative rather than a detrimental effect on self concept. These findings were in disagreement with those reported by Meyers (1976).

Schurr et al., however, suffered from certain methodological difficulties. For example, although longitudinal in nature, the study did not utilize a control group of retarded pupils who were mainstreamed into regular classes. Since no comparison between mainstreamed and special class pupils was carried out, one is not sure whether increased self concept was due to a developmental variable (such as maturation) or to special class placement. Such a comparison mainstreamed group would have gone far to justify the educational conclusions drawn by the authors. Furthermore, since over 22% of the pupils dropped out of the study before completion of Stage II, the experimental population may not have been a random one.

Gerke (1975) investigated segregated special education placement and regular class placement with supplementary resource room remediation on the self concept and reading achievement of EMR children. Sixty-one EMR elementary school children were administered the WRAT and the Piers-Harris in October and then again the following August. After analysis of variance, no significant differences were found between the two placement groups on either reading achievement or self concept. From these neutral findings, Gerke concluded that the learning environment did not make a difference on either academic achievement or self concept development of EMR children. Unlike Schurr et al. (1972) however, Gerke did not continue the study through a second academic year. Thus, one cannot be sure that differential effects of placement on self concept would not have surfaced for these pupils at some later date.

Carvojal (1972) investigated the effects of ten predictor variables (sex, IQ, parental employment status, parental education, SES, number of siblings in special education programs, teacher preparation, home status, curriculum, and educational setting) on four categories of the Piers-Harris ("I see myself as"; "my firends see me as"; "my parents see me as"; "my teachers see me as"). Pearson Product Moment Coefficients were calculated between all predictors and dependent variables. In addition, a multiple linear regression model was used to determine predictability.

The results indicated that three of the ten variable (IQ, SES, and parental education) were significant predictors across all four categories of the Piers-Harris. Conversely, the predictors of teacher preparation, curriculum, and educational setting were of no predictive use. From these findings, Carvojal concluded that educational setting, either mainstreamed or segregated, appeared not to be a significant variable in the development of the self concept of EMR adolescents.

Lessa (1976) investigated the effects of segregated vs. mainstreamed placement on EMR, emotionally disturbed, and neurologically impaired children on two measures of self concept (school related self concept and general self concept). Lessa administered the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory and the Guttman Self Report Scale to 90

males, ages 9-11, placed either in a totally segregated or integrated placement. Subjects were equally divided by handicapping condition. For each etiology, including the retarded subjects, Lessa reported that the segregated placement group scored significantly higher on school self concept but that there were no significant differences between the groups on general self concept. Since one of the instruments used (Guttman Scale) consisted of only ten items, however, the reliability of that instrument may be in question.

The literature reviewed thus far indicate either no significant differences between educational placements or a significant main effect favoring segregated special education classes. However, a word of caution is in order in interpreting these findings at least for those studies reporting no differences in placement. Such neutral or nonsignificant findings may have been caused by the relative insensitivity of the self concept testing instrument used. This insensitivity may have been caused by deficiencies built into the instruments themselves or may have been caused by an interaction between the instrument and its use on an experimental population not designed by the test authors. With more sensitive instrumentation or with greater concern for the appropriate linking of the instrument with the experimental population, a significant main effect between educational placement and self concept might have been found. This is not to suggest that the neutral findings reported were spurious or confounded. Rather, it indicates that additional studies, utilizing more sensitive instrumentation are needed before the hypothesis of no difference in self concept in differential educational placements can be confirmed.

Conversely, there is a limited amount of research which suggests that mainstreamed placement may be facilitative to self concept development in retarded children. Calhoun and Elliot (1977), for example, investigated self concept and academic achievement in EMR pupils over a three year period in both a special class and mainstreamed environment. Subjects were administered the Piers-Harris and the Stanford Achievement Test each September and June for three years. In order to standardize the groups and

control for a Hawthorne Effect, a standard curriculum was used across groups, and teachers were rotated between placement groups on a half year basis.

Calhoun and Elliot found that both self concept and academic achievement were higher for EMR pupils in regular classrooms. The authors concluded that the current trend toward mainstreaming EMR students into regular classes was empirically supported both on academic and affective grounds. However, Calhoun and Elliot did not report IQ data on the subjects who participated in the study. Thus it is not known if subjects were of the high IQ EMR or low IQ EMR variety. As Meyers (1976) has demonstrated, IQ can covary significantly with self concept and classroom placement.

Kendall (1977) has hypothesized that one reason for equivocal interactions between educational placement and self concept may be due to the fact that reading ability of retarded subjects has not usually been taken into account as a covarying variable. Kendall utilized an experimental design which covaried reading achievement and self concept in segregated vs. regular class placement.

Ninety EMR pupils (IQ 50-70) were administered the Illinois Index of Self Derogation to measure self concept and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to measure reading achievement. Main effects for self concept, reading achievement, and educational placement were reported. A significant interaction existed between reading achievement, self concept, and educational placement. For pupils with high reading skills, self concept was significantly greater in mainstreamed classes, whereas self concept was greater in self contained classrooms for pupils with poor reading skills. Kendall interpreted these findings to be in partial support of the mainstreaming model in that mainstreamed placement could be facilitative to a positive self concept when the reading skills of the placed pupil were relatively high.

Finally, Mickley (1977) examined the effects on self concept, academic achievement, and teacher perception of self concept when EMR, emotionally disturbed, and learning disabled children were placed together in the same classrooms as opposed to when they were placed in separate classrooms by handicapping condition. Subjects were

pre and posttested on the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory and the WRAT. A two way analysis of variance was conducted with type of exceptionality and educational placement as independent variables.

Mickley reported that educational placement was not a significant variable when covaried with type of exceptionality, academic achievement, or defensive behavior on the part of the children. Mickley concluded that the three etiologies could be placed in the same classroom without adversely effecting either academic achievement or self concept development and that in some cases, non-categorical placement actually enhanced self concept. While different than the other studies reported in that handicapped students being mainstreamed with normal children, Mickley's findings nevertheless are interesting in that they support non-categorical and non-labeled placement for exceptional pupils.

THE EFFECTS OF COVARYING VARIABLES ON PLACEMENT AND SELF CONCEPT

What conclusions can be made regarding the effect of mainstreamed placement on the self concept development of EMR pupils? At first, the results appear to be inconclusive with some studies indicating advantages for the self contained class or no significant differences between placements, while a few studies indicate support for a mainstreamed class. On further inspection, however, some covarying factors come to light which may help to explain these differential results and which perhaps should be taken into consideration in placement decisions.

For example, Meyers (1976) has demonstrated that the intelligence level of the EMR pupil to be placed may be a significant factor. High IQ EMR pupils seem to do well in a mainstreamed environment in terms of self concept; at worst there appears to be no significant differences for these pupils with differential educational placements. On the other hand, low IQ EMR students maintain significantly higher

self concepts in self contained classes. These findings may be due to differential acceptance of exceptionality with high IQ EMR pupils being more accepting of their handicapping condition. This hypothesis was partially supported by Mallenby (1974) who found that mildly retarded girls were more accepting of their subnormality than mildly retarded boys, but that moderately retarded boys were more accepting than moderately retarded girls. A study which covaried IQ level and sex, on self concept would appear to be needed to further illuminate this relationship.

Another significant variable affecting self concept and educational placement is reading achievement. As Kendall (1977) has demonstrated, children with high reading skills maintain their self concept in mainstreamed classes whereas children with poorer reading skills maintain higher self concept in self contained classes. One reason for this covariation of reading achievement with self concept and educational placement may have to do with teacher acceptance and reinforcement. Richmond and Dalton (1973) have concluded that for the EMR child to maintain a positive self concept, it is crucial that he be viewed as academically successful by the teacher. In the mainstreamed classroom, it may be that success is judged primarily by the teacher on the basis of the child's reading achievement and verbal skills. On the other hand, the special education teacher may consider other indices, both academic and social, in an individualized, criterion referenced judgment of student success. This would tend to help maintain self concept in poor reading EMR pupils. Thus, poorer readers would do better in an academic atmosphere where success was not intimately entwined with the ability to read and handle verbal materials and where interstudent normative comparisons were being made.

Finally, Smith, Dokecki, and David (1977) have raised the interesting possibility that the self concept of a child in a mainstreamed environment depends in part on whether the child is the only handicapped individual in that class or whether there are other handicapped pupils in the class with whom he/she could form sub-comparison groups. Smith et al. found that when students were forced to compare themselves with the entire

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mainstreamed class, self concept suffered but when children were allowed to compare themselves favorably with a sub-comparison group of other children, a positive self concept was maintained. Thus, the axiom "strength in numbers" may also be a truism for self concept maintenance.

CONCLUSION

The movement toward least restrictive environment has meant sweeping changes in the education of mentally handicapped children. Much has been argued about the pros and cons of mainstreaming and its effects on academic achievement. Much less has been discussed concerning the self concept of children who are placed in mainstreamed classes. A child, however, is more than a WRAT or Iowa test score. Rather, he/she is a whole individual, developing in personality as well as cognitive areas. As we learn more about the effect of self concept on cognitive academic functioning, educators need to become increasingly attuned to differences in children's self concept development as a function of educational placement. Mainstreaming may not be for all mentally handicapped children. To place a child in an educational environment in which he cannot maintain feelings of self worth may actually increase rather than decrease the restrictiveness in the school environment.

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